

In Slam The Need of the Hour

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By

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CONTENTS : . .

		Page
1.	Message of Peace & Goodwill	2
2.	Unifying Influence of Islam	4
3.	Brotherhood of Islam	5
4.	Universality of Islam	7
5.	Distribution of Wealth in	
	Islam	12
- 6.	No Religious Persecution	
	in Islam	13
7.	Commonwealth of States	14
8.	Islam A Way of Life	16
9.	Simplicity of Islam	16
10.	World Accepts Islamic Ideals	17
11.	Preservation of Islam	18
		7

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ISLAM The Need of the Hour

The advent of Islam is not, as is generally supposed, an accident in history. It is, in our view, a part of the Divine Plan, the final stage of a process set in motion by God himself. It has a past with which it has not, in any sense, broken, it has a future leading eventually to the fulfilment of the Plan. It is an error to suppose that Islam did not exist before, at any rate, in its essence. If Islam means, as it certainly does, belief in the Unity of the Godhead, trust in His Providence and absolute resignation to the Divine Will, it dates back to the time of the earliest prophets, known and unknown. They all preached the grand truth of the Oneness of God, and taught their followers to worship Him as He ought to be worshipped. Noah said, "I am commanded to be a Muslim." The Patriarch Abraham, when asked by the Lord, said, "To the Lord of all nations have I surrendered myself." (II: 132), About the belief of Abraham, held in equal reverence by the Jews and the Chris-. tians, the Holy Quran is very specific. "Abraham", it says, "was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a Muslim, turning always

to God alone." (III: 68). We find, in addition, a direct injuction in the Holy Quran:

"Follow ye the religion of Abraham who always turned to Allah alone." (III, 96).

The Prophet Joseph, the Quran tells us, prayed thus:

"So grant Thou that I may die a Muslim in the company of the righteous" (XII, 102)

Similar was the prayer of Moses, when he said:

"O our Lord, do Thou vouchsafe on us patience, and do Thou so grant that we die as Muslims." (VII, 127)

MESSAGE OF PEACE & GOODWILL

Islam did not come, therefore, to declare war against the old and contemporary religions. It recognized the verity of the continuous flow of the spiritual stream from the past, broadening from age to age, until the time came in God's wisdom for the solemn declaration:

"This is the day that I have perfected for you your religion, and My grace I have completed unto you, and for you I have chosen the religion of Islam." (V. 3).

essential truths established by the religions that had gone before. On the other hand it openly declared that it confirmed those truths,

and included them in its text. Indeed, it served to conserve them in their pristine purity, cleared of the accretions that had gathered round them in the course of centuries of their existence. This free, frank, and cheerful recognition of the previously revealed religions, combined with the bold declarations:

'For every people there is a Guide" (XXIII; 8), and,

"There is no distinct group of men amid whom never arose a Warner." (XXXV:23) assigns to Islam among world religions a position of unrivalled excellence. The noble founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, it may be recalled, stated a simple truth when he wrote that teachers, to whatever land they belonged, whose teachings have been operative for a good length of time and have been accepted by large sections of the human race, must be held to be God-sent, for the simple reason that Allah never decrees that false prophets should flourish. Quite in harmony with this statement came his declaration that the teachings of the Lord Buddha, Shri Krishna and Shri Ramchandra were undoubtedly of divine origin. He has mentioned these religious leaders in his writings in the most respectful terms. He did not deny that later tamperings or interpolations might have clouded, or even garbled the original teachings of these great teachers.

The essence of the original teachings was undoubtedly the Oneness of the All-perfect Divine Being, and it was on this fundamental truth that the structure of every revealed religion was founded. This root principle, Tauheed, from which emanated a multitude of spiritual truths and moral laws, could serve, the Holy Prophet thought, as the meetingground of the then known revealed religions. After his emigration to Madina, when the new born state was faced with the complex conditions arising from conflicting religious beliefs and warring political interests of a heterogenous population, the Holy Prophet, anxious to establish peace, waved the olive branch addressing the people thus:

"O ye, the people of the book; come ye to a formula common to you and ourselves, that we worship none but Allah, that we set up none equal to Him, nor do we take any but Allah as our Lord." (III; 6).

UNIFYING INFLUENCE OF ISLAM.

The mighty Call of the Holy Prophet to this common formula, worship of One True Allah, Tauheed, could not remain unheeded by those to whom it was addressed. And in the space of a few years it transcended the frontiers of Arabia, and met with response, ready or tardy, from vast masses of humanity, spread over Asia, Africa and parts of Europe.

To this unifying influence of Islam, men of light and leading, even from outside, have borne unstinted testimony. We would quote but one passage from the pen of that selfless leader, highly respected in India, C. F. Andrews:

"Islam is a supremely unifying, and not a dividing, faith. One of the greatest of all blessings which Islam has brought to East and West alike has been the emphasis which at a critical period in human history, it placed upon the Divine Unity,Islam has been both to Europe and to India, in their darkest hours of aberration from the sovereign truth of God's Unity, an invaluable corrective and deterrent. Indeed, without the final emphasis on this truth which Islam gave, from its central position facing India and facing Europe, it is doubtful whether this idea of God as One could have obtained that established place in human thought which is uncontested in the intellectual world to-day."

BROTHERHOOD OF MAN.

From this belief in One Supreme God emerged but logically the conception of one humanity. The Prophet of Islam ceaselessly inculcated on his hearers that Allah was One, and that the entire human race was his family (النخلق عيال الله). This led to the grand conception of the brotherhood of man. A Muslim's duty was, on the one hand, to

worship his Maker, the One True God, and, on the other hand, to serve his fellow-man. Most practical in his thought and action, the Holy Prophet clearly realized that if the conception of the brotherhood of man is to become more an idealist's dream, a tangible reality, it must be given form in the land of his birth, to start with. The severity of the age old internecine feuds amongst the Arab tribes must, he thought, be reduced to the minimum, and the way must be paved for gradually welding them together into one nationality, into one brotherhood. This was, of course, a super-human task and could not be achieved without God's special assistance. The Holy Prophet, aided by the Holy Spirit, applied himself to the appointed task. It is the verdict of history that revolutionary changes were thus brought about in the religious, social and political conditions of the country. Islamic brotherhood came into existence within the lifetime of the Prophet. To this new brotherhood the Holy Quran refers thus in graphic words:

"And hold fast, all of you, to the Word of Allah and scatter not; and call to mind the favour which Allah bestowed on you. Ye were enemies to one another, and lo, He planted in your hearts love for one another; thus ye became brethren out of Allah's Grace, and ye had been on the brink of an abyss of fire, and it is He Who saved you therefrom." (III; 104)

After the passing away of the Great

Master the four rightly guided caliphs, particularly Omar, kept alive the spirit of brotherhood in Islam by precept and example.

UNIVERSALITY OF ISLAM

This conception of brotherhood in Islam did not in any sense militate against the idea of the wider brotherhood of man. Indeed, the one supplied sinews to the other. It was an easy passage from brotherhood in Islam to the brotherhood of man, finding its consummation in the universality of the Prophet's mission. He is reported to have enumerated three distinctions with which Allah had favoured him. One of these, he said, was that while the mission of other prophets was more or less regional and national, his was extra territorial, universal. (Al-Bukhari).

We read in the Holy Quran :-

"Say, O mankind, verily, to you all have I come as Allah's Messenger." (VII, 159).

Again,

"O mankind, to you has come from your Lord the Manifest proof; and to you have We made to descend effulgent Light." (IV, 175).

In such unambiguous words the great claim to universality was made by the Holy Prophet of Islam. Thus it was that Islam from the very start became; in content and outlook, a universal religion. Thus it was that the laws and teachings of Islam, free from

hide-bound rigidity, acquired the characteristic of universal applicability, both in terms of space and time. With the growth and expansion of Islam a comprehensive code of international morality came into being, based on the eternal principles of justice and benevolence. Among many, the following Quranic verses may be cited:

"O ye believers, stand up for the sake of Allah as upholders of justice, and let not your ill-will against any people prompt you to refrain from conducting yourselves uprightly. uphold justice: this is nearest to righteousness." (V; 9).

"Verily Allah so commands that ye practise justice, benevolence and charity to all as to your own kith and kins. And He forbids you to act in an unseemly manner, to do evil deeds, and to cause breach of peace."

(XVI, 91).

All will recognise that virtues on which Islam places the geatest emphasis-justice and fair dealing with all, benevolence and unstinted charity—are just those that hold together society, and that the vices that cause disintegration of society, and break-up of a state are atrocious conduct, individual or collective, harmful deeds, and indiscipline leading to revolt. It is to secure the collective good of humanity that the Holy Prophet of Islam has, by preaching and practice, declared covenants to be inviolable and fulfilment of international

obligations sacred. Indeed treatment of covenants as mere 'scraps of paper' and violation of inter-state obligations, coupled with the evils of power politics, worked to bring about, within the last fifty years, atleast two world wars that have left for us problems, whose name is legion, baffling all endeavours of solution. In the competition in the forging of nuclear weapons and the launching of the audacious experiments with a view to conquer space, there lurk the forbodings of another world war, infinitely more destructive than its predecessors. To save the world from certain destruction, men's mind must be changed, and nations must be made to realize that the world is large enough for all nations, great or small, to exist and develop in peace. In despair men have begun to look to religion for the redemption of the world. And rightly so; for, after all, it is religion that touches the hidden springs of human action and guides and controls motive forces.

The main causes to which may be ascribed the fearful troubles of today are the following:-

- 1. Racial discrimination,
- 2. Adoption of wrong standards of economy,
 - 3. Communal feuds,
 - 4. Race for world domination.

(1) NO RACE DISCRIMINATION IN ISLAM

From its very inception Islam has set its face sternly against racial discrimination, and has exerted itself to the utmost to remove all artifical barriers between race and race, between nation and nation. For the first time in the history of mankind, a new standard of judging man's excellence was laid down in these solemn words of the Holy Quran:

"O ye mankind, We have created you, men and women, and we have divided you in to tribes and nations, that ye may distinguish yourselves one from the other; verily before Allah the most honoured of you are these who are the most righteous; indeed, Allah has the fullest knowledge and information of all things." (XLIX: 14).

This declaration struck a death-knell to all kinds of aristocracy, whether of birth, of caste, or of wealth. The black were, brought to the level of the white. By one stroke, and once for all, the abominable colour bar was removed. Even today, at this distance of time, stories like those of Little Rock are not heard of in Islamic countries. Nor have problems of discriminatory legislation like those of South Africa arisen in the Middle or Far East.

"The Arab has no superiority over the non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab possess any soperiority over an Arab; ye are all children

of Adam, and Adam was made out of dust."

These were the memorable words of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, (may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him), that resounded in the valley of Mina on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage. What was the result? By these solemn words, the racial pride of the Arabs was brought to the dust. The distinction between Arabi and Ajami, similar to what existed eleswhere between Jews and Gentiles. Greeks and Barbarians, Patricians and Plebeians, was brutally divested of the halo of hoary antiquity. The weak and the downtrodden no longer received capricious doles as from the more fortunate, but were given definite rights in religion as also in the body politic. Women, who groaned under disabilities of sex, and were treated as less than chattels, began to breathe as men's equals. Manumission of slaves was encouraged on the slenderest grounds, and this led gradually to the total abolition of slavery. There were, and are, no untouchables in Islam.

If the world is to be reconstructed and peace is to be established permanently, racial jealousy and discrimination must be given a decent burial. If the new order is to be hastened, the world must perforce accept the ethical values of Islam and translate them into action in both national and international life.

(2) DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH IN ISLAM

Difference between the rich and the poor, which have undoubtedly unbalanced the economy of many lands, are being sought to be removed today by social pressure and legislative enactments. Communistic plan of economy is being introduced in certain countries, and socialistic pattern of life in certain others. Experiment follows experiment. Attempts, often commendable, are being made to improve the lot of the common man, and to raise his standard of living. All this is to the good. But Islam even at the time of its birth, foresaw such inequalities in social economy, and promulgated institutions like (1) Zakat and (2) Sadaqat, giving these the sanction of religion; (3) It enacted laws of seccession in a manner that wealth and property could not accumulate in the hands of the few; (4) It effectively banned usury and (5) encouraged trade and commerce. Men have begun to realize today that if right equipoise is to be restored in the economy of any country, some plan on the lines indicated by Islam has to be adopted. Surely life has become too complex today, and conditions have arisen that are strange and novel. But Islam has clearly laid down the basic principles of adjusting national economy, leaving the way open to adaptation according to the exigencies of a fast changing world, yet in perfect loyalty to those basic principles.

(3) NO RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN ISLAM

Religious feuds and communal roits have been responsible for the perpetration of the blackest of crimes - pillage, plunder, rape, arson, and bloodshed - and have darkened the pages of history in many countries including our own. This is largely due to pride and prejudice, bigotry and fanaticism, impatience and intolerance - evils that die very hard in all ages.

Islam has never been a militant religion, inspite of what the adversaries say. It is late in the day to write apologetics - the theory has been exploded already - regarding the unjust and untrue allegations against Islam of forcible conversions and religious persecutions. We would only refer those interested in the study of the subject to Sir Thomas Arnold's scholarly work. "The Preaching of Islam." It will be sufficient for our purpose to quote two important verses from the Holy Quran that clearly define extremely liberal attitude of Islam towards other religions. The first is this:

"And abuse not even those who call to gods other than Allah, for out of enmity and without true knowledge will they in return abuse Allah". (VI: 109).

This means that the Muslim's attitude should be liberal even to polytheists, and yet

polytheism is the very antithesis of Islam.

The wisdom of the injunction is quite clear. Mutual abuse is bound to lead to crimination and recriminations, and ultimately to riots and bloodshed.

The second verse forbids desecration and destruction of temples and other houses of worship. It runs thus:

"If Allah had not repelled some people by others, cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which Allah's name is greatly remembered, would have been destroyed." (XXII: 41).

It deserves to be noted that the lives of Muslims are to be sacrificed not only to stop their own persecution by their opponents and to save their own mosques, but to save churches, synagogues and cloisters as well, in fact, to establish perfect religious freedom. The mosques, though they are the places where the name of Allah is remembered most of all, come in for their share of protection even after the churches and synagogues, such is the tolerant attitude of Islam to other religions. Indeed we are not aware of such or similar instructions in other scriptures.

(4) COMMONWEALTH OF STATES.

Desire for world domination has largely been at the root of present-day troubles. It has divided the world into two principal power

blocs with their satellites, changing their affiliations as opportunism dictates. There is a competitive race for armaments. Science is being prostituted to create new and deadlier weapons. The world is thrown into a state of hypertension, ever in dread of a third world war, which, if it flares up, is sure to destroy God's beautiful earth, with its grand civilization which its denizens have for centuries laboured to build. Adoption of the Islamic plan of world government will alone relieve the high tension According to this plan all States are to get equal opportunities of growing freely and independently, each following its own tradition, genius and temperament. No single State, or for that matter, no group of States, can nourish and entertain, under this plan, any aggressive designs against another State or group of States. A somewhat unified world government may be brought into existence, if all the States form themselves into a Commonwealth and act in co-ordination with another. This, of course, represents an ideal condition, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Islam also envisages a United Organization to which disputes as between States or groups of States may be referred. Should there be refractory member unwilling to submit to the decision of the Organization, the remaining member States must combine against that member and bring into effect armed intervention. (XLIX:10 & XX:132). It may be mentioned here that the modern

United Nations' Organisation has been forced by experience to differ from its predecessor, the League of Nations, in scheme and methods, and has been able to avert a catastrophe in several zones of danger. Although the goal is yet far-of, some advance has certainly been made. Is not this a tacit acceptance of the Islamic plan as adubrated in the verses above referred to?

ISLAM, A WAY OF LIFE.

From what has gone before it should be clear that Islam is a religion more practical than speculative. It is not scholastic philosophy, nor even theology, though it includes both. It discourages abstruse disputations, of the mediaeval Schools. It is pre-eminently a Rule of Conduct, a way of life. The active principle which is its distinguishing feature, has enabled Islam to prove itself a beneficent influence, a civilizing agency throughout its career in history. (1) Intellectually, by promotion of science and philosophy, it brought light to a great part of the world. (2) Morally, it established the sanctity and inviolability of human relations. (3) Spiritually, it enabled man to realize himself and to learn to live by God, in God, and for God.

SIMPLICITY OF ISLAM.

As a religion, Islam is simplicity itself. It is free from dogma. It does not lose itself in labyrinthine ritualism. It needs no pries-

thood, every Muslim being his own priest. It does not recommend monasticism; nor does it prescribe ascetic exercises. Painful pricking of the flesh or maceration of the body, Islam does not consider indispensable for the elevation of the soul. It never countenances celibacy and renunciation of the world and its legitimate interests. It positively condemns running away from social or family responsibilities. It does not believe in never ending cycle of existence Belief in the hereafter is an essential article of faith in Islam. It, however, does not subscribe to transmigration or transubstantiation of soul. It believes in God's Final Judgment, and in Heaven and Hell, but not as something to be looked for in dark unknown future. These begin here and now in our present life on earth, although their consummation will take place in the life beyond. The Muslim is taught to seek the good, both of this world and the next, not to abjure one for the other. This is not to say that Islam is without idealism. But its idealism is not something airy and ethereal. It has its flesh and blood. It is strengthened and reinforced by stern realism. Its spiritual and moral values are harmoniously blended. The texture of Islam is made up of warp of deep faith in God and the woof of love of man.

WORLD ACCEPTS ISLAMIC IDEALS

Islam has now lived through nearly 14

centuries, and history has recorded the landmarks of its progress during this period. It has proved its wonderful virility and fitness to survive. It is by no means a spent force, as some of the biased critics suppose. Nor has it outgrown its utility. Even in these times of storm and stress, service of Islam is being requisitioned for bringing back the ship of civilization to its moorings. Those, who have eyes to see, can see for themselves how, through pressure of circumstances, the world is approximating to Islamic ideals, consciously or unconsciously. The process is continuing. And it requires no gift of prophecy to say that in the coming years the co-operation of Islam will have to be sought for in an increasing measure in all serious endeavours to bring in the New Order, to establish the Kingdom of Heaven, the cherished dream of saints and philosophers alike.

PRESERVATION OF ISLAM, GOD'S ACT.

Such, we believe, is the dispensation of Providence. And, to this end, God Himself has undertaken to preseve, on the one hand, the text of the Holy Quran in its purity, and on the other, to maintain the potency of Islam undiminished.

"Verily, it is we who have sent down the Remembrance, and it is on us that its preservation rests." (XV:11).

How then we may ask, has the process of preservation been in operation? The Holy Prophet is reported to have said.

"At the head of every century shall Allah send one to whom shall be entrusted the revivication of Islam for the good of the Ummat."

This was a prophecy of hope; and, as a matter of fact, it found its fulfilment in everyone of the last centuries when a God-sent reformer, a Mujaddid, appeared. Such a man under guidance received from on high, discharged the duties assigned to him and served to keept the light of Islam burning in its full effulgence.

ADVENT OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH

Evantually, the time came for the fulfilment of a host of prophecies made by the Holy Prophet in respect particularly of the 14th century, Hijra, a critical period when Islam would be assailed from every imaginable quarter externally, and, further, there would be fear of disruption internally.

At this time, a particular man of God, the long-expected Mahdi, the Promised Messiah whose greatness would be commensurate to the seriousness of the stuation, was to appear to save Islam from internal and external danger. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian claimed to be the Promised Messiah and the

expected Mahdi. His sacred life was full of events, and was spent in the service of Islam. He wrote more than eighty books, besides innumerable other contributions in the form of leastets and articles in newspapers, in support of Islam as a powerful agency for world regeneration, and thus laid the foundation of a new scholastic system 'Ilm-e-Kalam' for the like of which we have to go back to the writings of Imam al-Ghazali. He set about and carried out the reform of the Muslims themselves; he led the defence of Islam against outside attacks. By his pen and tongue he set forth the unique excellences of Islam and proved that it was the only religion that could satisfy, in this age of material science, the spiritual thirst of man. He claimed that God constantly spoke unto him, and favoured him with such signs as he vouchsafes on the chosen ones, on his own message-bearers. He declared further that any one, who followed Islam with loyal devotion and walked in the path of Allah, would see Signs, hear the voice of his Maker. Thousands responded to his call, and sitting at his feet, witnessed Signs almost every day. Thus did he create an atmosphere in which he demonstrated that the God of Islam was a Living God, and that Islam was a Living Religion. He never felt tired of saying and writing that, while other religions rested content with the mere narration of the stories of the past of the spiritual experience of saints who lived long ago, Islam was, able

Islam anew, and proved that it amply met the needs of the present age of science. Many came to him as agnostics and atheists, and they returned as men of faith, stirred to the deepest depths of their soul. He founded the Ahmadiyya Movement which is now known all over the world.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE AHMADIYYA MOVEMENT

The good work of the Great Mirza was carried on by his able successor, a remarkable personality Hazrat Maulana Nuruddin. He worked with zeal to achieve the solidarity of the Jamaat. His untiring service for the six years of his Khilafat was a most valuable contribution to the Movement. After his demise in 1914 his mantle fell on the young shoulders of the illustrious son of the Great Founder, Hazrat Mirza Bashir Uddin Mahmud Ahmad, the Promised Reformer.

- 1. In the course of the last 45 years that he has been at the helm of the Movement the message of Islam has been carried to the farthest ends of the earth.
- 2. Missions have been established in important places of Asia, Africa, Europe and America,
 - 3. The translations of the Holy Quran

have been published in English. Dutch, German, Swahili, Luganda, Yurba and Urdu; and those in Russian, Indonesian, Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, French. Malayan, and in several other Indian languages are under print.

4. As many as 300 mosques, large and small, have been built in important centres in various parts of the world. The day, we do hope, is near at hand, when the supremacy of Islam over all other religions will be established as envisaged in the Quranic verse:

"It is Allah who sent down His Messenger with Guidance and the True Faith, in order that He may establish its supremacy over all other religions." (XLVIII: 29).

We conclude this paper with the beautiful words of Promised Messiah the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement explaining the purpose for which he came.

"The work which God has commanded me to perform is that I set about removing the cause that have strained the relation between God and His Creature;

"That I make manifest such of the religious truths as had long remained hidden from the eyes of the world;

"That by unfolding the Truth and putting an end to religious disputes I proceed to lay the foundation of peace; "That I bring to public view, not so much by words of mouth as by inward perception and experience, those divine forces that remain latent in the inner self of a man, and only exhibit themselves through the effect of meditation and prayer.;

"That I bring out such specimens of spiritual experience that had hither to remained buried under the darkness of man's baser self;

"And that, above all, once again I plant in the minds of men the ever-living sendling of Tauheed, now well-nigh vanished, pure and bright, and free from adulteration of Shirk;

"All the above are destined to come to pass, surely not out of mine own strength, but out of the Power of Allah, who is the Lord of heaven and earth."

(Lecture on Islam, page 34)

"God the Great has so willed that all such persons as are possessed of a noble nature and live in various parts of the earth, whether in Europe or in Asia, be drawn towards Tauheed. This is Allah's purpose for the fulfilment of which I have been commissioned:

(Al-Wasiyyat).



BERNARD SHAW ON ISLAM

I have always held the religion of Mohammad in highest esteem because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capability to the changing phases of existence which can make itself appeal to every age. The world much doubtless, attach high value to the predictions of great men like me. I have prophecised about the faith of Mohammad, that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow, as it is begining to be acceptable to the Europe of today. The Medieval ecclesiastic either through ignorances or bigotry, painted Mohammadanism in the darkest colours. They were in fact trained to hate the man Mohammad, and his religion. To them Mohammad was anti-Christ. I have studied him-the wonderful man, and in my opinion, far from being an Anti-Christ, he must be called the Saviour of humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness.

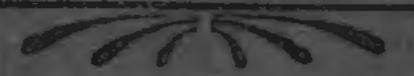
(George Bernard Shaw.)

Publisher's Note:

The article, "ISLAM THE NEED OF THE HOUR" was originally written for the religious conference held in Imphal (Assam) on 20th & 21st Dec, 1958. Thereafter it has been published in various periodicals and papers. Now in view of its usefullness it is being published in the form of a booklet.

The cost of its publication has been very kindly borne by Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Butt, to whom our thanks are due. May God bless him for his sincere and selfless service to the faith.

Mirza Wasim Ahmad
Secretary for Missionary Work
Ahmadiyya Community
Qadian (Punjab) India.



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- 6. Message of Peace.
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